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ABSTRACT

This study examined the strategies that 12 kindergarten and first-grade French immersion students in Ontario developed for oral communication and the contexts of such communication. Over the course of the school year each student was videotaped once a month in various classroom settings. The transcriptions of student conversations and utterances were compared to the accumulated hours of French instruction at each taping, and categorized by type of communication strategy. These strategies included mediation of meaning, modelling, sizing up context, cross-lingual interactions, code-mixing, formulaic speech, and novel speech. Student utterances were also classified by context, such as: (1) teacher- or assistant-initiated interactions with students; (2) student-initiated interactions with the teacher or assistant; (3) student-initiated interactions with students; and (4) students talking to themselves. The strengths of current classroom practice in immersion programs are also discussed, as well as future directions for research and practice. (Contains 24 references.) (MDM)

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GETTING STARTED : SECOND LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT IN K-1 FRENCH IMMERSION

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An earlier summary version of this report was presented to the Sixth International Conference on Second/Foreign Language Acquisition by Children, Chicago/Rosemont, in November 1992.

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Classroom research of the "qualitative" kind is in some ways more difficult to conduct than "quantitative" research, which typically involves entering a class for a limited time to administer a test or a survey. Qualitative studies such as this require observation and recording of classes in action, on a number of different occasions. The researcher must gain access to classrooms over a period of time without disrupting regular routines. The unflagging cooperation of teachers and administrators is essential throughout. The children who are the human focus of the study, and their parents, must give their willing consent. Data must be collected and processed, in this case involving the recording and transcribing of eighteen hours of original classroom discourse. The entire enterprise requires adequate financial support.

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I. INTRODUCTION

1. Purpose of the study

The effectiveness of French immersion has been well researched, along with general educational concerns such as its effects on first-language (L1) literacy. Extensive studies have been made over time of immersion students' second-language (L2) production, generally showing that this is noticeably superior to that of core students, especially in the areas of comprehension, fluency, and pronunciation. Criticism is also heard from time to time of the formal aspects of structure, syntax and idiom (Hammerley 1987), and proposals have been made for methodological adjustments such as more structured teaching of the language (Lyster, 1987), or for more systematic strategies for handling errors (Obadia, 1981). Such studies have contributed a great deal to our present understanding of how immersion works, its strengths and its shortcomings. However their focus on the L2 performance is often more in terms of the product, as observed at different stages, rather than the actual processes of language development that occur in the classroom from one day to the next. There may have been a tendency to "focus research efforts on immersion outcomes rather than on immersion processes" (Tardif & Weber, 1987: 75). Few, if any, attempts have been made to document the processes by which L2 speech "emerges" in the

immersion classroom, beginning in the formative years of kindergarten/grade one. These are sometimes referred to as the "preproduction" phase, since there is no question that for the children (unlike the teacher) English is the normal language of classroom use. On the other hand, the relatively few instances where they do use the target language may prove to be very instructive. What forms and lexical items emerge first? In what contexts? How is this affected by different learning activities? How can this rudimentary phase be seen within the context of the long-term development of the child's L2 competence? These are the kinds of questions which prompted this study.

Immersion brings about "instructed" (classroom), rather than "naturalistic" (or "street") L2 acquisition (Ellis, 1990). Ellis' study of classroom learner language use focusses on situations of teacher-directed discourse, probably the most typical kind of classroom context, rather than on "the 'interlanguage talk' that results from small group work" (p. 81). However, the interactions that take place between students through work and play in activity centres or various forms of cooperative learning represent meaningful communication whose "ground rules" are probably significantly different from those that operate in teacher to student exchanges, occupying a kind of

middle ground between teacher-directed and naturalistic discourse. In the early stages, as we have noted, such interactions take place mainly in the L1. Where the L2 is used the linguistic level is likely to lag behind that of teacher-initiated interactions, which usually have the conscious aim of promoting accuracy and encouraging the learner to "stretch" to a higher level of performance. However, in student to student interactions, or in the (relatively rare) cases of student-initiated exchanges with the teacher, fragments of the L2 are often mixed into the L1 and not always apparent to the teacher, especialy as her attention at such times may be shared with a number of other students. Yet this kind of L2 use by the student may prove to be just as instructive for identifying features likely to remain as long-term acquisition.

One of the features which makes immersion unique as a language teaching methodology is its principle of "gradualism." It permits individual learners to move at their own pace from exclusive L1 use, through L1/L2 mixing, to the production of whole, if imperfect, L2 utterances at a time, and in contexts, which may vary from one learner to another. This is somewhat different from ESL classes, for example, where speakers of many diffent languages must adapt to the "lingua franca" (English) as

quickly as possible to make themselves understood. I would also suggest that in core L2 classes, even the most "communicative" ones, the learner's opportunities (not to mention capacity) for free expression are limited, while mixing of the languages ("What time does the cloche sonne, monsieur?") may be regarded almost as a breech of discipline! In immersion we accept many different modes and strategies of learner communication. We also know that these same learners will eventually come to communicate in the target language with ease, if not necessarily with native accuracy. How does this come about? My interest in recording and analyzing samples of L2 speech from the very beginning of a program was prompted more by curiosity than from any preconceived notions of what I might hear. The samples obtained occur in a variety of contexts, involving teacher to student and student to student interactions. Almost by accident, as it turned out, we also obtained samples of a third kind of interaction - what might be called "student to native-speaking visitor" - which occurred between the children and the research assistant.

This study of the L2 development processes in the earliest stage of immersion, then, has two focal points. First, the **strategies** the students develop for oral communication may be inferred from the characteristics of the utterances themselves,

what the students actually say or try to say in the language. Here we may examine discrete lexical items (isolated words), phatic (social) and other kinds of "formulaic" or "prefabricated" speech, simple and complex novel sentences (not modelled by the teacher).[1] Secondly, the **contexts** associated with such discourse are of potential interest. In recent years research in both L1 and L2 development has become increasingly interested in classroom discourse and interactional analysis. Such research is concerned with such questions as "How are conversations structured?" "Who initiates the topic?" and so forth. The ability to engage in realistic conversation, sometimes referred to as "unplanned discourse" (Ellis, 1988: 17), is an important component of the learner's developing "communicative competence" (in addition to formal grammatical accuracy). I believe there is evidence in this study that the beginnings of this "discourse competence" can be found in the earliest stages of an immersion program.

2. Procedure

The study was begun in September 1991. It was originally hoped to cover a two-year span, however available funding was

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[1] Swain and Lapkin (1989) describe utterances as "minimal, phrase, clause, or sustained."

sufficient for one year only. Twelve students were selected for the study, three from each of the four participating schools: Bellewood and McCallum (Windsor Board of Education), Bishop Cody (Windsor Separate School Board), and Kingsville (Essex County BOard of Education). The children's ages at the beginning of the study ranged from 4.10 to 6.8, with 5.7 as the mean. Three of the schools are immersion schools and one is a dual track school. Depending on the board the early immersion program may begin in (1) half-day SK (no previous FSL), (2) full-day Grade 1 (no previous FSL), or (3) half-day JK. Students in (1) and (2) were in the first year of the program. In the case of (3), on the recommendation of the school, the students were taken from SK, which was the second year of the program. Required permission was obtained from the appropriate board research committees and procedural ethics agreed upon. The participating students were selected by the teachers, according to preestablished criteria. Parental consent was obtained for all the students in the participating classes, and a further special consent was obtained for the students selected for special study.

During the school year 1991-92 each child was taped for a fifteen minute period about once a month. The taping was done by a bilingual undergraduate assistant who was able to sit in on the

classes, play-groups and learning centres without disturbing the normal routines. The children came to accept her and involve her as an active participant in their activities. Transcribing the recordings was more difficult than anticipated. Several conversations may be taking place at the same time. At this age, moreover, children change partners, or switch from dialogue to monologue with disarming frequency! Comprehension poses many problems, since at this age even native speech is often incomplete or illogical by adult standards. Not all children have fully mastered the phonological, morphological and syntactical systems of the L1.

In this report, the speech transcriptions are followed (in parenthesis) by a number indicating the total accumulated hours of previous French instruction (PFI) at the time the recording was made. Although length of instruction is just one, not necessarily the most important, factor that affects a student's progress, it may nevertheless be useful to be able to locate individual utterances on a time scale. This ranges from 68 to 778 hours of PFI. Where a number of different utterances are quoted by way of illustration of a particular characteristic or strategy, these are ordered according to the hours of PFI.

II. THE LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

1. Hearing and understanding

Children entering the first year of school have one immediate task, that of understanding and adapting to the new environment. In an immersion classroom this means primarily understanding the language by which the teacher conveys information, feedback, expectations, instructions and so forth. In a study by Sandra Weber and Claudette Tardif (1987) a number of sense-making strategies have been analysed. They include:

1. Attending to meaning over form
2. Negotiation of meaning
3. Mediation of meaning (translation)
4. Modelling and imitation
5. Anticipating routine sequences & patterns
6. Using the filter of past experience
7. Comparing first and second languages
8. Good guessing and approximation
9. Random guessing
10. Sizing up people and contexts
11. Relying on reciprocity of communication
12. Attending to situation meaning structure
13. Asking questions

We recorded many instances of attempts to make sense of the L2 input provided by the teacher[2]:

Mediation of meaning (translation or paraphrase of key word or phrase to fix or verify sense)

A Qu'est-ce que tu fais, ****?
S What?
A Qu'est-ce que tu fais?
S What am I making? (209)

A C'est ton tour.
S My turn? (221)

T Trois, quatre, cinq, six. Ah, tu as oublié le six.
S Forgot the <u>six</u>. (525)

Modelling (imitation of unknown or meaningful words)

S And this turns.
A Ça tourne?
S <u>Oui, ça tou[r]ne</u>. (567)

T Mets cette chaise ici et tu peux prendre cette chaise pour toi, là.
S <u>Cette, cette chaise . . . ici</u>. (722)

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[2] Note on transcriptions:
T = Teacher
A = Assistant
S = Students, differentiated by number (S1, S2, etc.). These codes have no reference to a particular speaker other than in the actual exchange that is being quoted.
<u>Underlined</u> text indicates use of **French** by a **student.**
Numbers (in parenthesis) indicate previous hours of French instruction (see p. 11).
[****] indicates that a student's name used by a speaker has been omitted.

A Qu'est-ce qui est dans l'eau ici?
S1 Uh, hmm, b- bubbles.
A Oh, des bulles?
S2 Des bulles. (778)

Sizing up context

T J'ai besoin de deux choses dans la boîte de la même longueur. Deux choses de la même longueur. Lesquelles, lesquelles dois-tu utiliser ici? Deux choses . . . de la même longueur?
S (Holds up pencil.) This one.
T De la même longueur? Chercher deux choses.
S Hmm.
T Lesquelles?
S The two almost the same height. (245)

T Colorie les objets qui sont pareils. De la même longueur.
S What, every one the longest?
T Non, de la même longueur. Comme ça, monsieur. Comme tu as fait ici. . . Regarde ici. ****, regarde ici. Il y a trois objets. Quels deux objets sont pareils?
S Okay. So do this small one?
T Non, non, ici. Regarde. (Demonstrates.) Quels deux objets sont pareils?
S Those two. (245)

T Qui n'est pas allé chez Mme ****? Levez la main. (Several raise hands)
S If you, if you went, don't raise your hand, I think she said. (245)

S1 Now we see here that this is so heavy. What does it feel like?
S2 Hard.
S1 Smooth or hard.
A Dur.
S2 Smooth.
S1 Huh?
A Dur. Hard.
S2 Hard, hard, hard, smooth, smooth, soft. Okay, what do - does this feel like? Feel that.
A Mou.

S2 Mou?
A Mou.
S2 Yeah, that means soft. (567)

The children make frequent use of such sense-making strategies. The meaning of a new word or key phrase may be required in order to successfully handle a situation. Comprehension of the spoken input thus develops very quickly. Evidence of this can be seen early in what may be called "cross-lingual interactions." These are characterised by a full and meaningful L1 response to L2 input from the teacher.

Examples of cross-lingual interactions

T Est-ce que c'est brisé, ****?
S What?
T Est-ce que le crayon est brisé?
S It just snapped a little. (267)

A Oui, donne-moi le portrait. You can . . .
S But I gotta do the hat. (567)

A Et le soleil?
S It's right here. (567)

T Est-ce que **** a fait des biscuits pour Père Noël?
S I can't make them yet. (613)

T Peut-être, tu peux jouer avec **** avec les grands blocs?
S ****'s playing there. (613)

S Can I, can I do my math now?
T Non, il faut finir ça.
S I did. (614)

T Qu'est-ce que le bébé fait?
S Nothing. (614)

A Tu joues où?
S In the water centre. (664)

T Est-ce que tu vas colorier ça?
S I already colour' it. (664)

T Pourquoi est-ce que tu ne peux pas manger ça?
S 'Cause, 'cause when I was, when I was born I was allergic to ice cream. (722)

T Qui est fâché dans la salle de classe ici?
ALL ****!
T Elle est toujours fâchée.
S (Student referred to) I am not! (778)

The input in these examples may not be very demanding, since it is usually focussed on the here and now (a sound teaching strategy at this stage). However occasionally a student is able to make sense of input that is quite complex and deals with a displaced topic:

T Moi et Monsieur **** vont le faire ce soir quand les enfants ne sont pas ici. On va piger. Alors ça peut être n'importe qui, ****, parce que tout le monde a la chance. On va piger une fille et un garçon de chaque groupe.
S Will we be here? (267)

2. Speaking

Certain underlying assumptions about the role of L2 oral production in the L2 classroom underlie this study. Whenever the learner utilizes her/his "available L2 knowledge to receive and produce messages in the target language" (Ellis, 1988: 15), we

must assume first an ability (adequate knowledge of vocabulary and structure) and secondly the will or decision to make use of that knowledge instead of staying within the security of the L1. The first, the development of language knowledge and communicative competence are of prime concern to teachers and curriculum planners and is the focus of this section. The second, however, is perhaps equally important since it has implications in such areas as motivation, the structuring of activities and classroom dynamics in general and will be addressed later in this report.

In looking at the actual utterances as evidence of a developing L2 system, we should take account of the distinction, which is fairly well established in research (Krashen, 1981; Ellis, 1988), between speech that is modelled, planned and focussed on language and that which is unmodelled, unplanned and focussed on the message (also referred to as "communicative" speech). Although models of L2 development vary, there is a consensus that utterances of the former kind, which usually occur in response to a teacher-initiated stimulus (e.g. "Qu'est-ce que c'est?") may not indicate that the learner is ready to use that language element in actual conversational exchanges. Only the extreme view that is usually associated with Krashen (1981) would

hold that teachers should avoid such language-focussed routines. At the same time, however, the latter kind of output, which following Ellis I will call "unplanned discourse," in which the participants use the language for a real exchange of information rather than as part of a prescripted routine, is a truer reflexion of the learner's communicative competence at a given developmental stage. The samples that follow fall primarily into this category, although it is not always easy to make the distinction in practice. What the teacher intends to be a practice drill may turn into a conversation. What is intended as a free exchange may be taken by the student to be a drill!

At first, unplanned oral use of the language represents a very small percentage of the total output. The earliest instances consist of isolated words embedded in English sentences, the strategy of code-mixing. Also fairly early we begin to hear examples of prefabricated or formulaic speech. Finally, sporadic attempts to use the language in novel utterances are observed with some students, but not before January at the earliest. This latter, creative speech is likely to be characterized by errors and is referred to here as novel speech. This then represents a broad classification of the three kinds of strategies for oral language production at this stage.

This also seems to be the order in which the strategies are first encountered. Of course there is considerable overlap. Instances of code-mixing and formulaic speech continue to occur, especially when new words and expressions are encountered. The three categories will now be elaborated.

1) Code-mixing is the occurrence of L2 elements in what is essentially L1 speech. There may be a number of different reasons for this. Because of the learning context the child may not know the equivalent L1 word. Or it may represent the first tentative effort to imitate - and to please - the teacher. In the immersion setting the words most likely to undergo mixing at an early stage are the basic objects and concepts associated with classroom activities: numbers, letters, colours, days, months, parts of the body, family members, classroom objects, curriculum subjects, and forms of address. Numbers and letters are at first given in sequence and only gradually in isolation.

Examples of code-mixing

We can play at the mathématiques. (80)

I wanna eat cinq. (160)

We can eat cinq of them. (160)

There's a whole bunch of papiers there. (173)

I wanna get a deux, I wanna get a deux, I wanna get a deux. (221)

You need six [-s] collants and then you get . . . something. (221)

We need all the sable we can get. (221)

You got les pommes? (267)

Deux minutes until the bell rings. (313)

Now it can fit in . . . the boîte rouge. (567)

Santa doesn't start with b. (664)

Everybody went to the salle 'e bain. (664)

What page? (706)

You do that page ici. (706)

Madame, I'll just sit on le serviette. (722)

I'm colouring inside the fleur. (778)

I made more savon. (778)

It was grand. (778)

Un grand one. (778)

Mixing often results when individual context-specific words receive salience (special emphasis) through their association with particular activities. Typical examples noted are:

banane, bateau, bonhomme (de neige),
bricolage, ensembles, fâché, fantôme, fatigué,
feu, foulard, gomme, goûter, majuscule, miniscule,
pâte à modeller

Words often heard in the context of common classroom routines are

particularly prone to mixing. A notable example is "fini." Hearing this repeated in such expressions as "Qui a fini?" may account for the following typical mixed utterances:

I'm all fini. (245)

I'm fini. No I'm not fini. (567)

and even the transitive form:

I'm all fini my name. (245)

This early use of the participle in isolation from the auxiliary "avoir" may contribute to the widespread occurrence in later years of the notorious "je suis fini." The following exchange (in which the teacher can hardly believe her ears) is somewhat of an exception:

S J'ai fini.
T Pardon?
S J'ai fini.
T Très bien. Tu parles bien, monsieur. (614)

Other instances were also noted in which an isolated participle stands for a past tense verb:

That tombé. (614)

It blisé. (= "brisé") (778)

Code-mixing tends to occur mainly with nouns, adjectives and verbs, in other words the primary vehicles for conveying meaning. However some interesting cases were noted involving the mixing of "function" words, e.g. prepositions and adverbs:

S How do I get this on?
A Hmm, avec ton doigt.
S (Raises finger). Avec this? (525)

Ici do I do "il neige"? (567)

A phenomenon often observed by immersion teachers is what might be called "morphemic code-mixing." For example a verb might contain a L2 stem or inflexion to produce a hybrid form as in the following:

T ****, on ne court pas dans la salle de classe.
S1 Marche!
S2 I was marche-, I was marche-ing. (209)

T Qu'est-ce que **** fait?
S Crawl-er
T Pardon?
S Crawl-er (614)

Finally, even at this level we found occasional examples of code-mixing with a whole syntactical unit, specifically the dependent infinitive:[3]

T Quand vous avez fini, vous pouvez manger les graines.
S Yeah, I can't wait to get fini, 'cause then we get to manger les graines. (245)

I wanna manger le cerise. I eat cerises. (706)

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[3] Lindholm & Padilla (1978) working with bilingual Hispanic children found this kind of "phrasal" mixing in addition to the more usual one-word (lexical) mixing. Code-mixing is not necessarily developmental or peculiar to children. It has similarities with the recently noted phenemenon of "Quebecker English" ("I'll stop at the dépanneur on the way to the autoroute.")

To summarize, code-mixing is a strategy for oral production in the target language which shows up quite early and consists of embedding L2 words, parts of words and whole phrases in L1 utterances. According to some research (McLaughlin, 1984: 96-97) the "foreign" intrusion cannot violate the L1 rules of grammar and syntax (as can be seen from the "get to manger" example). Although it may seem a long way removed from whole L2 speech, it seems to serve a useful purpose and should not be discouraged. Through mixing, the learner practices in the easiest way available some rudiments of French vocabulary, pronunciation and even grammar, without being forced prematurely to abandon the security of the first language. Those methodologies which advocate not forcing the learner to use the L2 until s/he is ready to do so (Krashen & Terrell, 1983) would probably support this non-threatening gradualist approach.

2) Formulaic speech describes those "expressions which are learned as unanalysable wholes and employed on particular occasions" (Ellis, 1985: 167). Regularly heard L2 exressions such as classroom instructions are quickly understood and become available for active use, sometimes as complete L2 utterances, sometimes mixed with the L1. This is also sometimes referred to as "prefabricated" or "unanalyzed" speech. It enables the

learner to produce whole sentences in the target language relatively early without being able as yet to analyze the underlying rule.

Examples of formulaic speech

Excusez-moi. (114)

Puis-je tailler mon crayon, s'il vous plaît? (245)

Peux-je jouer aux blocs? (267)

Touche pas. (337)

Deux plus un font trois. (429)

Est-ce que je peux ramasser les livres, s'il vous plaît? (614)

Je ne sais pas. (706)

Page numéro dix-huit. (706)

Puis-je boire de l'eau? (722)

Formulaic speech is often subject to code-mixing as in the following examples using weather expressions, either in full or in simplified form:

Did you do il pleut, ****? Did you do il pleut?
I need to do il neige. (567)

Where's the other neige? 'Cause I don't know what to do. (567)

S1 I have to have il fait beau.
S2 I need neige. (567)

In the following exchange the formulaic "pas toucher" has sparked the participants' interest to the extent that it becomes a recurrent buzzword, a kind of game:

S1 (In a group making Christmas garlands and eating Fruit Loops) Pas toucher, ****.
(Few seconds later)
S2 Pas toucher, ****. Pas toucher, you.
S1 Pas toucher this. (Giggles)
(Both children continue to repeat pas toucher.
Later in the activity)
S1 This is gonna be pas toucher. This is pas toucher. (160)

Referring to the distinction made earlier between "planned" and "unplanned" discourse, research sometimes finds it hard to decide on the place of formulaic utterances in the language development process. A lot of the time the children use them in reponse to routine teacher directives; but we were also able to record one exchange (recorded in early January) in which real conversation is put together entirely from formulas:

S Deux plus un font trois. ****! Regarde ici! Regarde ici! Deux plus un font trois. . . . Madame, regarde ici. . . . Madame, regarde ici. Deux plus un font trois.
T Oui, c'est excellent. (429)

The role of formulaic speech in L2 development has often been noted (Ellis, 1984: 53 ff.). Ready-made expressions enable learners to communicate with some fluency, since they do not have to process the underlying rule system. In time they can

contribute to development of the learner's rule system (e.g. the negative in "Je ne sais pas"). They can also develop into patterns, whereby a structural component such as "Est-ce que je peux . . . " can be used with different lexical content. Finally, sequences of formulas can show up as scripts or mini-dialogues, for example the "merci/de rien" sequence, of which a number of instances were recorded (see below). This study seems to confirm the importance of such expressions in the early (and indeed in later) stages. Teachers should encourage their use and should perhaps be alert to introducing new ones in appropriate contexts.

3) Novel speech describes the learner's attempts to use acquired language elements to construct "new" utterances (rather than simply imitating input from the teacher) entirely in the L2. This is an important watershed in L2 development. It seems likely that because early immersion students make free use of the L1, with or without code-mixing of L2 elements, this stage of "attempted meaning performance" (Selinker, 1972) is delayed, in comparison with ESL classes for example. It is most likely to be facilitated by situations in which the student is motivated to communicate personal thoughts, desires, opinions, etc. and to do so (for reasons not easy to discern) in the L2. Because the

meaning to be conveyed is uppermost, rather than the language forms, these may not be fully adequate to the task. Therefore, this kind of speech is likely to be replete with **errors**, either through interference from the L1 or through overgeneralization of L2 rules. This aspect will be dealt with more fully in Section III.1, below.

Novel utterances, however idiosyncratic in structure, result from an effort to think in the L2. Instances recorded are relatively few at this stage. In the following the speaker makes creative use of limited L2 resources to express her/his thoughts in a sustained manner:

Pas des choses de manger? (522)

S1 My dad doesn't wear glasses, neither does my mum.
S2 Pas m..., pas mon maman aussi. (614)

S Madame, madame a dit that w... venez, venez et, et, et, dit ça.
A Oh. Est-ce que tu sais quel numéro, uh, c'est quel numéro? (Pointing to clock)
S Oui, c'est . . . le cinq.
A Le cinq?
S Le c... Le grosse, uh (a?), venez avec le cinq. (706)

(Describing a picture) Deux grosses grosses dinosaures . . Un est mangé le tête . . . mangé la pied et la jambe . . . mangé la queue. Un est mangé un crayon . . . (706)

T Quelle couleur est-ce maintenant?
S Noir.
T Et?
S Et orange.

T Et orange. (About to leave) Okay, ****
S (Volunteers) Un est noir et un est tout, les autres est orange.
T Orange aussi.
S Et un est noir. (778)

A Qu'est-ce que tu fais?
S Moi 'cris le nom de moi. (778)

Such exchanges are characterised by an underlying effort to persist. Given the right motivation even at this stage some students can be induced to stretch their communicative resources to the utmost.

The formal characteristics of some of these novel utterances would provide an interesting topic for further research, namely the possiblility of modifying existing L2 development models, such as that of Ellis (1988), specifically for immersion. In settings where novel speech occurs earlier, such as in ESL classes, beginners tend to produce "primitive" sentences that are "functionally stripped" (no articles, prepositions etc.) strings of individual words, each capable of bearing a range of meanings and functions. A good example in early FSL would be "moi manger" which might mean: "j'ai mangé," "je veux manger," "je vais manger," or "je suis en train de manger." This is a universal strategy for novices compelled to express meaning with just a few words and no grammar. In the examples cited above, however,

there are some beginnings of a simplified but specifically "French" grammar. Articles and prepositions are inserted, though not in a native-like way. There is also a suggestion that at this stage of her/his "interlanguage" (Selinker, 1972) system, the learner has an interim hypothesis that "all verbs end with /e/."

III. THE DEVELOPMENT OF COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE

Learning to understand and (at this stage to a still limited extent) to speak the language is part of the broader task of learning to communicate in real situations: language use as well as language usage. This involves the development of a complex of skills that are required for successful communication: formal accuracy, contextual appropriateness, and the successful use of available language resources to convey the intended message. The term "communicative competence," although variously defined, is generally used to describe this complex of communicative skills seen as the ultimate goal of L2 teaching (Canale & Swain, 1980). In early immersion, our study suggests two components of communicative competence which begin to develop in the earliest stages: 1) grammatical competence and 2) discourse competence.

1. Grammatical competence

As stated in the section on novel speech, the child's attempts to utilize her/his still limited resources to convey meaning lead inevitably to an interlanguage that is replete with "errors" (Selinker, Swain & Dumas, 1975). The learner's rudimentary rule system differs from the standard in morphology, syntax, and lexical meaning. It might be helpful to view these

errors more as "learning strategies" (Selinker, Swain & Dumas, p. 142), which might even be consciously deployed, rather than as an indication of what the learner believes to be "correct." One of the earliest such strategies is that of transfer ("interference") from the L1. We recorded several instances: in vocabulary, with coinages from English such as "un table de manger" (522) or "une pomme arbre" (706); in the invented demonstrative "ça page" (706) (cf. "that page"); and in word order, as when a child asked the teacher: "Do you have noir paper?" (525).

However other errors clearly reflect the attempt to develop a rule system for the L2. These are "intralingual" rather than "interlingual" in origin. The term "overgeneralization" has often been applied to these types of error. They illustrate a learning strategy that looks like a process of simplification: one form of the article, or the possessive, does service for all; one form of the verb (probably ending with /e/ as noted earlier) is used with a variety of subjects and tenses; a variety of prepositional functions can be performed by a small number of words (notably "dans"). One researcher (Corder, 1981) has rightly pointed out that this beginner grammar only looks simple to the more competent observer; for the learner the process is one of continuing elaboration or "complexification," since "you

cannot simplify what you do not possess" (p. 149). We found evidence that a more elaborate grammar does begin to develop at this stage, as will be shown below.

The following illustrate the principle of "rule simplification" in the child's "interim grammar" at this stage:

Examples of intralingual (generalization) "errors"

possessive:

Regarde mon main. It's all rouge. (522)

Dans mon poche. (614)

... pas mon maman aussi. (614)

definite article:

le lettre P (522)

le ligne (614)

le maison (706)

verbs:

Joey jouer avec le bébé. (614)

Tu colorier ça. (614)

Le vert color-er very good. (706)

prepositions:

Dans le ligne . . . dans le top (614)

first person pronoun:

Moi ai fini. (267)

Moi ai color-é un cheval. (706)

Moi ai être fini. (706)

Moi ai using the vert. (706)

multiple numbers:

Vingt et un . . . vingt et quatre, vingt et six, vingt et sept, vingt et huit (245)

These should be looked at as early attempts to systematize, to look for patterns in the language, rather than as "harbingers of fossilization" to be dealt with immediately. Moreover, as noted in the Introduction, it is hardly realistic to expect correct usage of the L2 when the forms of the L1 may not yet be stabilized. (Typical examples heard are "bited," "writed," and "he gots.") This, however, should not be taken as meaning that the teacher should stop modelling correct forms or requiring repetition. The importance of providing grammatically correct input and of eliciting correct forms during teacher-student interactions seems to be supported by a number of exchanges we recorded in which the child is able to self-correct or at least shows evidence of knowing that the grammar system is not quite as simple as s/he may have thought:

A Qu'est-ce que tu fais?

S I have to make a tête. . . . Un tête.
A Pardon?
S I have to make une tête. (267)

T Qu'est-ce que c'est ici? Ces deux choses ici, qu'est-ce que c'est.
S Les yeux.
T Ce sont les yeux. Oui, c'est ça. Et ça, qu'est -ce que c'est ça.
S Hmm, les bouche. (Generalizes from "les yeux," however the proper answer is "le nez.")
T (Attends to both problems) Ça c'est la bouche? Non . . .
S Le nez.
T Ça c'est le nez. Est-ce que tu peux dire: "Voici le nez?"
S Voici le nez.
T C'est ça. Et ça c'est quoi?
S Le bouche.
T Voici la bouche. Répète.
S Voici la bouche. (525)

T Uh qu'est-ce que c'est ça, ces deux choses-là?
S Le, le, les yeux. (664)

T Qu'est-ce que c'est, ****?
S C'est un fleur.
T C'est une fleur. . . . Okay, et ici, qu'est-ce que c'est?
S C'est les fruits.
T Ce sont les fruits. (Few minutes later) Qu'est-ce que ça ici?
S Les fruits.
T Est-ce qu'on dit "c'est les fruits" ou "ce sont les fruits"?
S Ce sont les fruits.
T Bravo. (778)

Many basic structures can in fact be acquired accurately at this stage, as shown by the following examples which were recorded almost entirely in the second half of the year.

Ex. of correct structures

"c'est" + negative

Non, c'est pas beaucoup. (614)

Ce n'est pas noir. (706)

noun + adjective

Un ballon rouge. (664)

Un nouveau bébé (614)

Les petits bébés (614)

Un petit bébé (614)

Le gros gros cheval (706)

Une tortue Ninja (706)

interrogative

Quel nombre? (245)

Un quoi? (337)

Qu'est-ce que c'est "excuse me"? (722)

(One of a great many instances with "Qu'est-ce que?")

Où est le F? (778)

demonstrative

Cette, cette chaise . . . ici. (722)

subject + present tense

****, what did you do? Qu'est-ce que tu fais? (429)

J'ai faim. (614)
(More usual: "Je suis faim.")

Tu es fatigué, ****. (778)

imperative

Regarde ici le lettre P (522)

Regarde mon main. (522)

Viens ici encore. (522)

****, dis ça pour moi. (706)

****, ****, écris avec ton crayon. (706)

passé composé

J'ai fini. (614)

My screwdriver a brisé. (522)

subordination

A mouse that's praying. Un souris qui prie. (337)

Madame, quand . . . . (incompleted) (614)

(only examples noted)

There is of course no indication of consistency of use on the part of the speaker. As has been pointed out by Ellis (1988: 166-167) the learner's grammatical competence at any one time is "variable" (different forms of the same structure can coexist) depending on the context of use. It should not surprise if the same child at the same stage of L2 development uses a correct structure such as those listed above in a formal exchange with the teacher and an idiosyncratic one (as shown in the section on novel speech) in a "spur of the moment" exchange with a classmate.

2. Discourse competence

Discourse competence is the ability to use the language successfully and appropriately in realistic communicative situations, "putting the pieces together," for example in exchanging information, responding to directives, or using forms of politeness.

One of the major benefits of immersion, which looks like an interesting area for further research, might prove to be that it enables students to interiorize basic conversational structures at a very early stage. This can already be seen in the "cross-lingual exchanges" discussed earlier. In such cases the attention of all the participants seems to be focussed on what is being said rather than on how it is being said. They assume the role of real partners in real conversations. The following are good examples of ways in which formulaic speech can provided the basis of real exchanges, or "scripts" (cf. Ellis, 1984: 57, and above):

S (Offering some pumpkin seeds) Want some?
A Merci.
S De rien. (245)

S1 ****. ****.
S2 Oui?
S1 (Points to box. S2 gives him a card)
Merci beaucoup.
S2 De rien. (429)

An example was noted earlier (p. 27) in which formulaic expressions provide the basis for sustained conversation. The participants in the following are also able to construct whole L2 conversations using mainly (but not entirely) formulaic expressions:

S1 Ça c'est le lettre P. Comme ça.
S2 Et comme ça.
S1 Ça c'est trop petit. Un grosse. Comme ça
(Teacher is overheard in background, using the word "aussitôt")
"Aussitôt"? Qu'est-ce que c'est?
S2 "Aussitôt." Je ne sais pas.
S1 C'est un lettre?
S2 Je ne sais pas, ****.
S1 C'est un automobile?
S2 Je ne sais pas. Qu'est-ce que c'est?
S1 Je ne sais pas. (522)

There was even an attempt at some sophisticated humour:

S1 This is hard.
S2 ****, c'est pas . . . c'est très difficile, très difficile.
S1 You can say that again.
S2 C'est très difficile, Jean. (706)

In such situations students are engaged in authentic interactions rather than "planned discourse" with the teacher. Such instances are rare at this stage and seem to occur by chance. (It is questionable whether they could occur by design!) The following three-way exchange between the teacher and two students is particularly interesting. What begins with a routine

"management" question by the teacher becomes an authentic conversation in that it is (a) unpredictable and (b) involves participants who have some sense of conversational rules, notably those that govern "turn-taking" (Van Lier: 1988):

T Combien de personnes sont absentes aujourd'hui?
S1 C'est juste trois, ****, ****, et ****.
T Qui est absent?
S1 **** (twice), ****, et ****.
T Excellent. C'est combien?
S1 Trois personnes.
T C'est beaucoup, n'est-ce pas?
S2 Non.
S1 Non, c'est pas beaucoup.
T Pourquoi? Tu penses que ce n'est pas beaucoup?
S2 Oui, ce n'est pas beaucoup.
S1 Treize, c'est beaucoup.
T Oui, c'est vrai. (Laughs.)
S2 Treize?
S1 Oui, c'est . . .
T . . . Treize, c'est horrible pour Madame. (614)

The teacher instinctively recognizes that this interaction is perceived by the children as a non-routine, "unplanned" event. By means of her question, "Tu penses que ce n'est pas beaucoup?" she is able to encourage further contributions to the conversation in an atmosphere of humour and also in accordance with rules of mature conversation.

There has been an enormous amount of research in recent years on classroom discourse, the kinds of interactions that occur between teachers and students in L1 (Sinclair & Coulthard,

1975) and L2 classes (Hatch, 1978a, 1978b; Ellis, 1985, 1988; Van Lier, 1988). Examples based on the "status" of the participants will be given in the next section. The relevance of interactional analysis for SLD is based on the growing belief that grammatical and discourse competence develop interdependently rather than one before the other as is often believed. This view is best expressed by Hatch (1978b: 404), who suggests reversing the traditional assumption "that one first learns how to manipulate structures, that one gradually builds up a repertoire of structures and then, somehow, learns how to put the structures to use in discourse. We would like to consider the possibility that just the reverse happens. One learns how to do conversation, one learns how to interact verbally, and out of this interaction syntactic structures are developed."

3. Acculturation to the second language

So far we have looked at language development in terms of understanding and speaking, - input and output - , and the beginnings of overall competence in using the language for real purposes. One factor that will certainly influence the child's progress is the rate and extent to which s/he comes to recognize and accept the primacy of French as the language of the classroom. Individuals are likely to vary in this respect and be

effected by affective and extraneous factors such as parental attitudes. On the other hand we can assume that simply choosing the immersion option for their children suggests generally more positive parental attitudes than in the regular class.

In a number of instances students showed an awareness that French was the language of the class, that they should try to speak it and, more important, should help each other in this respect.

Acculturation to the "French agenda"

S1 You c-, you speak French!
A Oui.
S1 My daddy, my daddy was born in Quebec.
A Oui?
S2 (To S1) Say "oui." (160)

I know how to count up to treize in French. (245)

Les filles , . . . parlez français comme moi et ****. . . . Oui, ****? (614)

S1 ****, you did it right. ****, you did it right.
S2 Dis: "C'est bravo." (706)

You don't know how to say "pizza" in French? (722)

IV. LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATION IN THE CLASSROOM

The growing interest in ethnographic, classroom-based research has led to the realization that the classroom is a social setting in which the participants - teacher and students - interact with each other in similar ways and for similar purposes (e.g. establishing or confirming "status") as occurs outside the classroom. The importance of interaction in the L2 classroom has long been recognized. Communicative methodologies stress the importance of "negotiation of meaning" in the development of language, the same process that occurs between infant and "caregiver" in the development of the L1. In studying the language development we therefore have to consider also the types and contexts of interactions which take place in the L2 classroom, as "when we study language use and language learning in and through the social context of interaction, we are also in a very real and significant sense studying cognition" (Van Lier, 1988: 83).

1. Classroom interactions

By recording the students at regular intervals regardless of the type of activity in progress we were able to observe them in different modes of interaction. These are defined in terms of

(a) participants and (b) roles (who initiates the interaction?) One of the questions which motivated this study was whether there is much difference between the way children speak French to the teacher and to each other. Other modes became evident as the study proceeded. Broadly the interactions occur within the following framework:

1) Teacher-initiated interactions with students

2) Student-initiated interactions with teacher

3) Student-initiated interactions with students

4) Assistant-initiated interactions with students

5) Student-initiated interactions with assistant

An additional category, which strictly speaking is not interactive in nature but does involve an "addresser" and an "addressee" is

6) Student to self ("soliloquizing.")

In a study of this kind, each of these modes could be examined in terms of characteristics such as (a) topic (personal? academic?), (b) purpose (language practice? socialize?), (c) language use, (deliberate? casual?), (d) suprasegmentals (tone, etc.,), and could also be measured quantitatively in terms of frequency and length. In the the case of the following, observations will relate to such aspects, though not systematically and only those which seem particularly note-worthy.

1) In teacher-initiated interactions the students are on their "best linguistic behaviour," trying to produce the desired word or phrase. Teacher-student exchanges in the classroom have been much researched. The basic model as described by Ellis (1985: 146-149) consists of a "three-phase discourse" or "IRF exchange," in which the teacher initiates ("Is the clock on the wall?"), the student responds ("Yes, the clock is on the wall"), and the teacher supplies feedback ("Yes, the clock is on the wall.") This is the typical pattern of what we have called "modelled discourse," and its main overt purpose is the reinforcement of structure or vocabluary. Some of the exchanges quoted on page 36, above, illustrate this pattern. The literature has tended to criticize L2 teaching that consists mainly of this kind of exchange, since the element of "learner-initiative" is lacking.[4] This kind of criticism probably has greater validity for older and more advanced students. The examples noted earlier do seem to serve the underlying purpose of promoting formal understanding and accuracy. It is nevertheless interesting that in the examples recorded, while the students try to produce the desired form, their responses tend to be

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[4] E.g., Ellis (1988: 98) considers that "display questions" (questions posed by the teacher for language practice rather than real information) "do not invite the learner to respond at length or to initiate new topics."

characterized by a lowering of the voice and some hesitation. On the other hand their imitation of sounds, intonation and rhythm (segmentals and suprasegmentals) is often remarkably accurate.

2) Student-initiated exchanges with the teacher may be requests for attention, or help (Cf. Cathcart, 1986). They may begin with a French attention getter like "Madame" before moving in to English. The topic is often of personal interest to the child but may not seem immediately relevant to the activity in hand. If the teacher is concerned to follow the "agenda" such exchanges are likely to be quite short, but still provide an opportunity to supply new, "unplanned" input. The following is quite typical of such exchanges:

S Madame!
T Quoi?
S Know why I need this?
T Pourquoi?
S Because I'm making the cheveux.
T Pourquoi? Oh, pour l'halloween. (525)

In such situations the child's interest is focussed and the teacher can use them to encourage "stretching" (incidental learning):

S Madame ****, look at all the stuff I got that are the same lengths. Look at all the stuff I got that are the same lengths. . . . Look at all the things that are the same lengths.
T De la même - quoi? - long- longueur. Dis ça.
S Yep.
T Longueur.

S Longueur.
T Oui, très bien.
S (Without further prompting) Same longu-er. Même longueur.
T Excellent! (245)

At this stage, as would be expected, student-initiated exchanges with the teacher are relatively rare.

3) Student to student interactions, particularly when the teacher is not present, are to a very large extent conducted in the L1, even in the later part of the year. However, a few interesting exceptions have already been noted, in the discussion on discourse competence. The value of such interactions, other than for direct language practice, is mainly motivational when the children come to understand the underlying expectation of cooperative activities. We have already noted instances in which they encourage each other to accept the "French-first" agenda. A number of examples of cooperation in the area of language were recorded, whether in helping each other to understand instructions from the teacher or in supplying prompts for a needed word or phrase:

Examples of cooperation in activity groups

T (To S1.) Oh, monsieur. Combien d'objets y a-t-il ici? Combien? Deux? Compte.
S2 (To S1) She said you have to count.
T Oui, compte. (245)

S1 ****, . . . ****, . . . , **** . . .
S2 Yeah? Oui?
S1 Toi peux, uh, jouer avec mo', jouer, uh, à la, à la. . .
S3 . . . récréation.
S1 Récréation. A la récréation. (245)

A (Suggests to S1 that she help S2.)
****, veux-tu aider? Regarde, elle n'a pas fini. Do you want to help her? Okay, elle va t'aider, okay? Explique, explain it to her. Look. See?
S1 It's supposed to be one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, eight right here. . . . . Un, deux, trois, quatre, cinq. Un, deux, trois, quatre, cinq, six, sept, huit. Huit, down here.
S2 Right there?
S1 No move backwards. Un, deux, trois, quatre, cinq, six, sept, huit. 'Kay now? (525)

4) The study necessitated introducing into the classroom a French-speaking adult of somewhat different status than the teacher, namely the assistant, whose task was to record the speech samples and make contextual notes without disrupting the activities. This required the students' acceptance of her. Besides successfully achieving this she was able to project a French identity and came to be assigned a special role that was both similar to and different from the teacher's. Even when attempting to remain a passive observer, she was often drawn into assuming an interventionist role by the students themselves. An occasional role was that of encouraging cooperation, as previously noted. Assistant-initiated exchanges often followed the "IRF" pattern of teacher-student interaction described

earlier, however with a notable difference. Responses may be more informal and less predictable than with the teacher, showing a willingness to extend the conversation beyond the usual "three-part" format:

A Qu'est-ce que tu fais?
S Une pomme
A Une pomme.
S Wanna look at it? (525)

S1 (Drawing) This is a tongue. Does that look like a tongue?
A Hmm. Ça c'est une langue. Peux-tu dire ça?
S1 Ça c'est un langue.
A Une langue.
S1 Une langue.
A Hmm.
S2 How do you know that?
S1 I think she's French. (778)

The following is a good "discourse competence" example in which the child makes a credible attempt to respond meaningfully, in the "spirit" of the conversation. She is selling cheese snacks:

A As-tu vendu beaucoup?
S Non, just huit.
A Juste huit? C'est beaucoup!
S Pas beaucoup beaucoup. (313)

5) Quite unexpected was the extent to which students were willing to initiate exchanges with the assistant. Of particular interest is the following which is reproduced at some length. It results essentially from a student initiative that leads to a game, in which the usual classroom roles are reversed and the assistant becomes a sort of oral lexicon to be consulted. The

speaker is in the puppet centre, pretending to be various animals and constanly moving from one position to another:

S Hey, am I jumping? Or am I steady?
A Hmmm. Tu sautes.
S Oui. Am I steady or jumping?
A Tu es debout. Tu restes tranquille.
S Am I sitting or standing?
A Tu es assis.
S Am I sitting or standing?
A Tu es debout.
S (Changing puppet) Okay, now what is this pig doing?
A Il s'assoit.
S Oui. (Laughs.) And what colour is its tail?
A Rose.
S (Changing puppet) And what colour am I?
A Brun.
S What colour are my eye-brows?
A Je ne sais pas.
S Noir!
A Noir?
S What colour is my face?
A Hmmm, bleu. Non?
S Not bleu.
A Quoi?
S Brun.
A Brun.

. . . . . .

(The game resumes a while later)
S Hey, where am I?
A En haut.
S Now where am I?
A En bas.
S Now where am I?
A Ici.
S Now where am I?
A Près du côté.
S Hmmm. Now where am I?
A En bas.
S Now where am I?
A Dans le milieu.
S What does that mean?

A In the middle.
S Now where am I?
A Tu es collé. (S laughs.) Collé. Stuck.
S I am stuck! I am stuck!
A Tu es collé.
S Now I'm not. . . . Now where am I?
A En dehors.
S Now where am I?
A En dedans.
S Now where am I?
A En haut.
S Now where am I? (prompts) Upside down.
A Tu le dis.
S Upside down.
A A l'envers.
S Upside down?
A A l'envers.
S Now where am I?
A Tu . . . , je sais pas.
S I'm swinging. (Laughs) Now I'm en bas. (567)

In general the assistant provided L2 input which was in some ways more naturalistic, i.e. less characteristic of "teacher talk" than that provided by the regular teacher. She sometimes used whole utterances unanalysable for the child but comprehensible from context, for example the saying: "Chien qui va à la chasse perd sa place."

There may be value in having a French-speaking resource person in the immersion class in addition to the teacher. This might justify making use of the Official Languages Monitor Program, whereby a university student is assigned to help in a French or English second-language classroom.

6) "Student to self" (soliloquizing): It is easy to overlook a "conversational" mode which is very characteristic of children at this age, in which the locutors - addresser and addressee - are the same. Children at this age talk quite uninhibitedly to themselves. "Task-talking" is a name sometimes applied to this practice; it is described as self-initiated, "learner-autonomous and repetitive in nature" (Ellis, 1988: 124). Whereas the other types of speech-context listed earlier will continue throughout their schooling, this one may be more age-specific. However its value for L2, as for L1, development is evident. Soliloquizing provides valuable means of rehearsing and interiorizing vocabulary, phrases, and even sound/prosodic patterns that have some fascination for the learner. One student asks himself: "Where's my ciseaux?" (173). Another is busily sorting fruit snacks and suddenly exclaims: "Oh là-là! Oh là-là! . . . Oh là-là-là-là! Look at this yucky one!" (255). A third repeats an atypical expression that has obviously been picked up from the teacher: "Vraiment! Vraiment!" (267).

2. Facilitating activities

In an activity-based classroom students work in small groups on specific tasks such as making, drawing, searching, reading, copying etc. Within the group they help each other, ask and

answer questions cooperatively. The teacher circulates and from time to time gives whole class instructions. Activity-based learning seems to provide situations that increase the likelihood of L2 use, but this depends on planning. Groups of two to four seem to work better than larger groups which tend to lose their focus, but this can happen in groups of any size! Other optimum conditions seem to prevail when (a) the task is closely related to acquired language (e.g. parts of body, geometric shapes, etc.), and (b) the teacher makes regular visits. These observations are based more on impression rather than on data-based systematic research, which would be the object of a different study.

Games play an important role, as in any other classroom. It is outside the focus of this report to give a detailed catalogue of such games, other than to confirm that they seem to be particularly effective for focussing on specific topics such as pronunciation, spelling, or vocabulary. One example involves extending a student's name with an object beginning with the same letter ("Adam l'avion," etc.). Referring to the developing acceptance of the "French-first" dictum described earlier, a successful motivational technique we encountered is the game of "détective." When the teacher judges that the class is ready she

appoints a "detective" to note the names of the children who are using, or trying to use, the L2.

Songs were found to be very effective for fixing sounds, rhythms and vocabulary. Children memorize them quickly and sing them spontaneously, i.e. without waiting for the teacher to initiate the singing. They often continue to sing to themselves long after the class has moved on to another activity. Besides repeating they may manipulate phrases through word-substitution or practice individual words through code-mixing. After singing "Danse, danse, papillon (Saute, saute, le lapin, etc.)" one student produced idiosyncratic variations ("wa, wa, wappillon," "wa, wa, wa-ill-wa") that suggested a fascination with the word and its sound. Teachers often create their own songs, for example to accompany routines: "C'est le temps de tout ranger," "Les enfants marchent lentement." After the former a student remarks: "I'm tryin' to ranger" (313). Another becomes fascinated by the adverbial suffix in the second and produces: "We want, we want, we wantement" (778). Songs, when not a whole-class activity, can thus become a special form of self-talking (in this case "singing"), as defined earlier.

V. CONCLUSION: OBSERVATIONS, IMPLICATIONS

1. General remarks and recommendations

These actual classroom recordings were intended to provide clues relating to the L2 learning process and the contexts that might facilitate that process in the first level of an early French immersion program. They might also suggest why the immersion method, according to all available research, succeeds in producing confident and fluent speakers at the end of only a few years. In the first year the children experience the language through play and interactions, through listening, observing, asking, imitating, and finally risking the first tentative steps to express their own thoughts in the language. All the while they are beginning to interiorize vocabulary, structures, sound patterns, and what is particularly interesting whole conversational structures. Their subsequent development in these areas is likely to be relatively natural and painless as a result.

I would like to conclude this report with a summary of what appear to be the strengths of current classroom practices for facilitating L2 development, some tentative recommendations of how these practices might be strengthened or modified, indications of interpretative work still to be done and, finally,

a suggestion, which might be taken as a proposal, for curriculum development work which could be initiated to implement some of the suggestions outlined in this report.

In all the participating classrooms the teachers provided input in the target language which was appropriate to age and also in sufficient quantity. The children develop the expectation from the outset that teaching is done in the L2 and that understanding is an essential "survival" priority. Comprehension skills develop rapidly as a result, assisted by the teachers' communication skills. These indicate an awareness of the characteristics of teacher input which, acccording to current research consensus, facilitate SLD: a focus on the "here and now," appropriate as to language level, with the simplification characteristic of "foreigner talk" but <u>without</u> its abuses (unnatural volume, grammatical distortion through oversimplification, etc.).

The emphasis on activity-based learning centres provides many opportunities for exploring and manipulating language through the immediate experience of objects, actions and concepts. It also provides the framework for a variety of kinds of interactions, or what Van Lier (1988: 167) calls

"participation structures," or "the rights and obligations of participants with respect to who can say what, when, and to whom." More generally the variety of interactional role is probably to be welcomed in the light of calls for moving towards a learner-centred approach and away from a teacher-centred approach in immersion classrooms (Lapkin & Swain, 1990).

The following tentative recommendations for practice are offered as an outcome of this study.

1) **Formulaic** expressions for coping with classroom procedures ("Est-ce que je peux tailler mon crayon?" etc.), should certainly continue to be taught and their use encouraged, whenever the opportunity arises. The research consulted supports their value for SLD and we encountered a number of instances that bear this out. (This is also an important finding for the core programs, as well.)

2) **Target language use** in group work should be encouraged as soon as the children have minimum competence. Helpful might be the early teaching of formulas of politeness, requesting and responding to requests, encouraging others, etc. Motivational games like "détective" (p. 55) can be very effective.

3) Opportunities for **"unplanned discourse"** in teacher-student interactions could be explored. The essential characteristic of

this is that students experience conversational initiative. Without further research and consultation with teachers it is premature to describe actual activities which might achieve this, but it looks like an interesting avenue to pursue.

4) Bringing **native-speaking visitors** (of appropriate interpersonal skills) into the classroom can enrich the classroom environment in a number of important ways.

2. Future directions for research and practice

The following are some of the possibilities for further research and curriculum development suggested by this study:

a) Individual case studies could provide a contribution to our growing knowledge of early SLD development. For example, there may be "immersion modifications" that could be made to Ellis' "Variable Competence Model" (above). Is the development that this describes affected by the immersion beginner's "right" to use the L1 or to mix codes? After how many hours do the earliest "formulas," and the first examples of "attempted meaning performance" occur? This knowledge might help teachers in the planning of activities.

b) More detailed study of the structure of specific conversations between teachers and students might help in proposing a tentative account of how "discourse competence"

begins. This could provide an interesting parallel to the "grammatical competence" that previous research has tended to focus on.

c) Without awaiting the outcomes of these more theoretical questions, I believe that there is sufficient data to justify some exploratory work in the classroom, which could be carried out by individual teachers, on possible implementation of all or some of the recommendations made above. Such work would have the design of activities as its main focus.

Van Lier (1988), discussing the aims of second-language classroom research, warns of "the danger that data will be taken from the classroom without being returned in some enriched form" and goes on to quote Shirley Brice Heath that "teachers must learn to ask of visiting researchers: 'Okay, and what will you do for me in return?'" (27) In return for the opportunity to carry out this research it is hoped that this report will provide information of real use to immersion teachers and those involved in the administration and planning of programs.

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